

OPINION

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MUSINGS

WHEN a man is as old as in the third month of his eightieth year, the rhythm of his life is often considerably disturbed. The night for instance is no longer necessarily a time for sleep. On quite a number of occasions after tossing and turning for an hour or more in his bed, he has to give up. He then moves to a chair in the long verandah, and reading not being possible because of weak eyesight and general tiredness, just sits and lets thought or non-thought have its way with him. On one such occasion recently he suddenly found himself speculating on what would happen if Indira was temporarily incapacitated from the conduct of affairs. 'Good God' he felt, 'but that would mean Sanjay in charge at once. He has over a hundred personal followers amongst MPs in the Party itself, and who is there among the old members to challenge him? On the contrary, they would run to fawn on him. As it is, they say, many MPs and others bend down and touch his feet on meeting him for the first time on any day. Let us consider then, what is Sanjay? From his record during the Emergency and earlier and later, a very undesirable young man, with no special knowledge of anything except politicking. He lacks even the veneer of civilised behaviour that characterises his mother. Certainly not Prime Ministerial timber! On the other hand, Henry V came out of Prince Hal, the friend of foot-pads and thieves, but such marvels happen very rarely, and we in all probability are not likely to be so favoured. Prince Hal moreover respected the judiciary, Sanjay has made a bear-garden of most courts to which he was summoned. No, the mere contemplation of the possibility makes one shudder. So Indira keep well. The thought of your son in your place even for a short while, makes lighter at least some of your sins.

The mind turned away, and after passing through a blank interval, entered upon self-questioning "And is it fitting that you at this stage should be thinking about matters like this? Have you made your soul, old man, or are you so lost in the things of this world that you forget there is the other which you will have to go to very soon? Consider deeply, reflect carefully, it's later than you think." "To this question, there are of course, two sides" came the hesitating reply. "There is Hafiz's answer in the form of a self-question. 'The secrets of their kingdoms the rulers know/Why, oh reader in the corner, do you have to screech about them?'

This is the argument against the ordinary man, and especially the student and scholar, taking an active interest in public affairs, an argument very helpful to dictatorial regimes and one even democratic ones have tried to use on occasion. This view has nothing to do with age. It applies equally to all interested in public affairs. The other view is a corollary to the proposition that there is a time for retirement from the world, and once that has been reached, it becomes man's duty to turn his gaze away from the happenings, good and bad, around him, to think not of them but of the eternal that awaits him, so that the fall of an empire matters as little to him as the fall of a sparrow, while he sits in high place or low, lost in the immensity of the discovery of his own soul and of its intimate relationship with the universe." To the old man as he sat musing, thought coming to him from long distances as it were, so it seemed, the answer to the first side became apparent thus 'I am human, and anything that pertains to humanity, especially pertains so particularly as government and administration, must be of interest to me. Further since human beings form the raw material for these disciplines, human beings, especially those in charge, or likely to be in charge, of them, come within my purview'. To the second side, the answer came more haltingly, 'In my father's house are many mansions, it has been said, and perhaps there are more ways to making one's soul than by meditation and contemplation. The warrior who wields his sword in a good cause and falls at last still fighting, will he be denied entrance to the happy gardens because he did not meditate or live on a strict regime, fasting and scourging himself? No, Providence is more just. And if you think, mind, that the only proper study at this age are the perennial questions, Whence do we come, Where do we go, What is life, What death, then remember these questions have proved unanswerable throughout human history, and though perhaps modern man may in the centuries to come provide an answer, such tasks must obviously be left to fresh bright intellects which occasionally rise to flashes of inspiration rather than to old minds so loaded with experience as to have become incapable of rising into the empyrean. Who ever loved that loved not at first sight, and who ever loved at first sight except the young?'

The mind relaxed. For a time behind the closed eyes there was nothing but darkness, relieved by the odd patch of colour. Then it went on, Indira doesn't like being called a lady. Once she said if memory serves me right, Call me woman, not lady. Another woman, very dissimilar said the same thing the other day. Now there's something wrong about this. These two females do not like being called 'lady' because their connotation of the word is mistaken. To them, lady is someone snobbish, head in the air, conceited, looking down on people, thinking of herself as superior to the world. This impression, I suppose, is due to the behaviour of many so-called ladies. The real lady is of course quite a different person, honest, truthful, true to her word, conscious of her responsibilities and living up to them, considerate, compassionate, almost invariably on the side of the right, facing difficulties with a smile,

a tower of strength to all who seek her help, withal generally cheerful and modest, not forcing herself on anyone but not refusing to listen to any tale of woe and to help to the extent possible, graced with poise, dignity, a voice loud enough to be heard but not to scold, a sense of the appropriate, and a natural gaiety. I know, because I have had the good fortune to be in intimate contact with at least two of the real type, my mother of blessed memory and my greatly-loved eldest sister. They were not women only; they were primarily ladies. How wonderful it would have been if Indira had been one! What a different India it would have been, and who knows, perhaps with even a different and immeasurably better Sanjay!

This cricket that the cities seem to go mad about nowadays is surely very far from the game as a sport one used to know in one's youth. Now it is a gladiatorial combat with paid gladiators on both sides, very little sporting spirit and the participants, eyes mostly fixed on the main chance. To make it a matter of national honour is the height of absurdity; for the radio to devote whole days to it, cutting out all other programmes, an exercise in futility and an encouragement to laziness in office, factory and school. Good, you've won a Test series. Next time not all this fuss, please. Remember at best it is a game. To take it too seriously is to harm the country and yourselves.

COMMENT

The Indira-Gromyko talks ended in failure as they were bound to do. They left us in fact in a much more dangerous position than before. Not only was our ostensible plea of the withdrawal of Russian troops from Afghanistan turned down flat, but Gromyko used our soil to warn our neighbour Pakistan that it was next on the list for conquest, and all our dignitaries listened to him with what must have seemed tacit approval. Indira's defusing thus turned out to be a damp squib. Her main purpose was not, as was shown last week, the freeing of Afghanistan, (that country in her heart of hearts she had already conceded to the Russians) but the prevention of their further advance into Pakistan, i.e., into the most dangerous proximity to India. However much then we may spread the figleaves of Indo-Soviet friendship and our long record of fruitful co-operation, etc., etc., over the bare bones of Indo-Soviet relations, the gruesome face of the skeleton behind cannot be hidden any longer. India is in mortal peril now. If she is to survive it, she must take even at this late hour the action suggested earlier, sincere co-operation with Pakistan in joint defence against the Russians. If she does not, if she havers and send envoys here, and messengers there, and makes a great to-do about very little, she will find herself facing her Russian friend at Pakistan's eastern border, with the look upon his face not friendly at all any more. Then may follow ultimatums to Delhi "Prevent the Pakistan rebels from

regrouping in your territory, prevent them from crossing the very long border between you and us (oh yes, Pakistan of course, but that's merely a technicality now, it's really the South-Eastern boundary of the great Soviet state, i.e., of course until we move on again, and when we do, depends considerably on how you respond to our very reasonable requests).' So, finally after six months or a year maybe the blow may fall, Russian troops be patrolling the streets of Delhi, and our once-proud Indira be kneeling on the necks of us Indians to receive orders and instructions from her, and our, masters. Things are as they are, friends, and because you keep on prating of 'shared values' and 'long friendship', the pirate does not become any the less a pirate. He only chuckles to himself 'what fools these mortals be' and sharpens his long knife to make sure of its cutting edge.

TWO LETTERS BY GHALIB

These days Maulana 'Ghalib (God's mercy be upon him) is in clover. A volume of the *Tale of Amir Hamza* has come—about 600 pages of it—and a volume of the same size of *Bostan-i-Khayal*. And there are 17 bottles of good wine in the pantry. So I read all day and drink all night.

The man who wins such bliss can only wonder
What more had Jamshed? What more Alexander?

* * * *

Pretension is one thing and accomplishment another. One day Maulana Urfi (God's mercy be upon him) and Abul Fazl were disputing together. Abul Fazl said to Urfi 'I have prosecuted my studies to the farthest limit and brought my knowledge of Persian to perfection.' Urfi replied, 'How can you match my experience? Ever since I was old enough to understand every word that I have heard from the old women and old men of my house was in Persian.' Shaikh Abul Fazl replied 'I acquired my Persian from Anwari and Khaqani (two famous classical poets) and you learnt it from old women.' Urfi replied 'and Anwari and Khaqani also learnt it from old women'.

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